



Question: How can anyone claim to have the Truth? Aren't all religious claims the same?

Answer: The advantage of growing up in a more pluralistic society is that when we make a decision about who we think God is, we can't make it blindly. We now see a whole generation of people who, because of their exposure to other philosophies and religious ideas, do not think you should be a Christian just because your parents were. The advantage of this situation is that if you decide to fully commit to a worldview, it will be a radical decision, because it will be made in light of opposing views; in the full knowledge of the claims you must reject once you commit yourself.

The danger of our situation however, is when we let all the competing ideas begin to cause us to think that all the ideas must somehow be right or somehow "mysteriously" the same. Today many people reduce truth claims to a matter of preference like preferring red to green, not a matter of reality, like preferring the right answer in the math test to the wrong answer.

Postmodern thinking says that because we each have a background that includes language, culture, and habits that get in the way of our objectivity, NONE OF US is really capable of knowing anything for sure. Anyone who claims to have truth (like the Christian) is kidding themselves, they are really bound up hopelessly inside the inescapable cage of their "perceptions" - clouded as they are by a lifetime of conditioning.

A favorite illustration of the postmodern is the elephant and the blind men: We're all groping around trying to find truth, like blind men groping an elephant. One has the tail, the other the trunk etc. Each one gives wildly different descriptions of the "true" elephant. Which one is right? Well they all are in a way. So we're told, just like that, all religions are equally valid, they just describe a different part of the "god essence".

While this is an enduring analogy, it's flaw is that it's entire argument is self defeating. It says that all truth claims are subjective, yet this is a truth claim which asks to be taken as really true and not on the same level as other, subjective "truths". In the elephant analogy, someone who is NOT blind sees the situation for what it truly is. Who is this "seeing" man who can tell all the blind people that they are all blind and that they are REALLY only seeing part of the same elephant? The religious pluralist is making the claim to be the only one in the story who is seeing clearly.

You can see the irony: We are all blind, ah, but I see 20/20! This enlightened person alone has meanwhile telling us that there is no truth! The person who uses this analogy comes across sounding very magnanimous ("everyone is right!") and humble ("we can't know anything") but in reality there's a real arrogance implied! ("I see the situation correctly, unlike you blind ones who are groping around in the dark trying to describe your gods!")



In the end, I think the analogy has this to offer: we DO need someone from the outside to give us insight about ultimate things (God, soul, eternity etc). But this person cannot be the postmodern religious pluralist, for which of them have stood on both sides of the grave to have an advantage over the rest of us? So we all must make an appeal to some Authority for our religious beliefs. The Christian's appeal is to Jesus Christ.

But we must understand, we ALL take a "truth risk"! There are no risk free, catch-all philosophies. One must make an existential leap at some point. The postmodern view that all philosophies are the same will not do, because it automatically excludes the person who does not believe that all philosophies are the same! No worldview is perfectly inclusive of ALL religious claims.

So for Christians, their existential leap begins with the idea that the New Testament is at least a roughly historical document (a strong case can be made for this). We find there a man who claims to be both God and Man, who demonstrates in life and deed and word, evidence to back up the claims, and who gives convincing evidence to have stood on both sides of the grave and returned by his own power to tell us about it. Christians have decided that HE is the man who sees. He is the one who speaks to all us "blind men" to tell us what it is we're touching. Against the template of his insight, his teaching, his life, Christians decide to measure what is true, what is partially true and what is false.

So while I'm surrounded by other worldviews, and truth claims, and while I'm not 100% sure of my own insights... the elephant analogy provides a key to find a way out of hopeless subjectivity and not knowing. It's not in affirming everyone's pet ideas as equally valid (how can they be, when so many are mutually contradictory?!) The hope is in finding an authoritative voice from someone who "sees".

Christians humbly bet the farm on Jesus Christ to know truth with a capital "T" – and of course we do not claim to have ALL truth (1 Cor 13:12) or that there is NO truth in other religions. But where they disagree with Jesus, we must respectfully disagree with them.